

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0697

S E C R E T LONDON 05635

NODIS

AMBASSADOR PICKERING SENDS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, JO, XF

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN LEBANON

1. I MET WITH RIFAI MORNING APRIL 12. I DISCUSSED WITH HIM FACT THAT AMBASSADOR BROWN HAS BEEN CONTINUING HIS ROUNDS IN BEIRUT AND IN RECENT MEETING WITH JUMBLATT HAD STRESSED CONSTRUCTIVE CHARACTER OF SYRIAN ROLE. ALSO TOLD HIM THAT WE HAVE KEPT ASAD INFORMED OF BROWN'S ACTIVITIES AND MADE CLEAR OUR DESIRE TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF SYRIAN EFFORTS. WE HAD ASKED FOR SOME IDEA OF HOW SYRIANS ARE PROCEEDING, BUT THUS FAR HAD GOTTEN NO RESPONSE. I THEN TOLD HIM THAT SINCE WE HAD OUR OWN INTEREST IN RESOLUTION OF LEBANESE SITUATION, WE WOULD HAVE TO GO AHEAD ON OUR OWN. WE BELIEVE OUR IDEAS AND THOSE OF ASAD REGARDING A POLITICAL SOLUTION ARE NOT TOO FAR APART, BUT THAT THIS FOR US WAS NOT MOST SATISFACTORY WAY TO PROCEED IN SITUATION AS COMPLEX AS THAT IN LEBANON.

2. RIFAI REPLIED THAT HE WAS NOT SURPRISED AT THE SYRIAN STANCE. HE SAID IT WAS ONLY HIS OWN ASSESSMENT, BUT THAT SYRIANS HAD NOT DEVELOPED MUCH TRUST IN THE US AND THUS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE GUARDED WITH US ON THEIR ACTIVITIES). HE SAID THAT IT WAS NOT A NEW DEVELOPMENT.

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TNE SYRIANS HAD DEVELOPED HOPES FOLLOWING PRESIDENT

NIXON'S VISIT AND ON OTHER ISSUES (HE WAS NOT SPECIFIC). WHEN THESE HAD NOT DEVELOPED, THE SYRIANS, HE BELIEVED, HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE US WAS NOT TO BE TRUSTED AND WAS PLAYING ITS OWN GAME.

3. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE US COULD HAVE REVERSED THE SYRIAN POSITION IF IT HAD ACTED MORE POSITIVELY TO ASAD'S PLEAS FOR HELP IN WORKING OUT A SYR/AN SOLUTION TO LEBANON SEVERAL WEEKS AGO.

4. I TOLD RIFAI THAT WE HAD PROCEEDED WITH THE SYRIANS IN A VERY SUPPORTIVE WAY, AND THAT WHILE YEARS OF DIS-TRUST COULD NOT BE OVERCOME OVERNIGHT, THE SYRIANS SHOULD HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT OUR SUPPORT FOR A CEASEFIRE IN LEBANON AND THE WORKING OUT OF A GENERALLY SHARED SENSE OF IDEAS ON A POLITICAL SOLUTION. HOWEVER, WE HAD BEEN REALISTIC AND RESPONSIBLE IN WARNING SYRIA ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN INTERVENTION, ESPECIALLY AT THE LEVEL PROPOSED BY ASAD LATE LAST MONTH. WE BELIEVED ASAD DID NOT WANT A CONFLICT AND NEITHER DID WE. TO HAVE GIVEN HIM A GREEN LIGHT WOULD HAVE BEEN A REAL DISSERVICE WHEN WE KNEW THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD HAVE BEEN BAD FOR HIM. JUST AS SYRIA HAD RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE US, HE COULD NOT ASSUME THE US DID NOT HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION.

5. RIFAI'S ONLY POINT WAS TO REITERATE THAT THE US MISSED A "GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY". HE THEN WENT ON TO POINT OUT THAT SYRIANS NOW LINKED UP THE LEBANESE SITUATION AND THE MANDATE RENEWAL. THE SYRIANS, HE SAID, WILL CONCLUDE THAT THE FIGHTING AND DISTRACTION OF LEBANON IS TO FORCE SYRIA TO DIRECT ITS ENERGIES FROM THE MAIN JOB AT HAND--GETTING ITS TERRITORY BACK FROM ISRAEL. I TOLD RIFAI THAT THIS ANALYSIS DID NOT SQUARE WITH OUR EFFORTS TO HELP STOP THE FIGHTING AND BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION WITHOUT INTERVENTION BY SYRIA AND ISRAEL. HE SAID, NEVERTHELESS, THAT THE SYRIAN PRESS IS TRUMPETING THIS LINE AND THAT ASAD'S ENTRAPMENT IN LEBANON IS BEING FREQUENTLY COMPARED TO NASSER'S ADVENTURE IN YEMEN.

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6. COMMENT: RIFAI'S ASSESSMENT IS A LOGICAL EXTENSION OF WHAT HE TOLD ME LAST WEEK ABOUT THE SYRIAN REACTION TO OUR ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON. I ASSUME HE AND THE KING HAVE CONTINUED TO BE IN TOUCH WITH ASAD. RIFAI TENDED TO MINIMIZE RECENT SYRIAN MILITARY MOVES.

7. PLEASE REPEAT AMMAN.

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